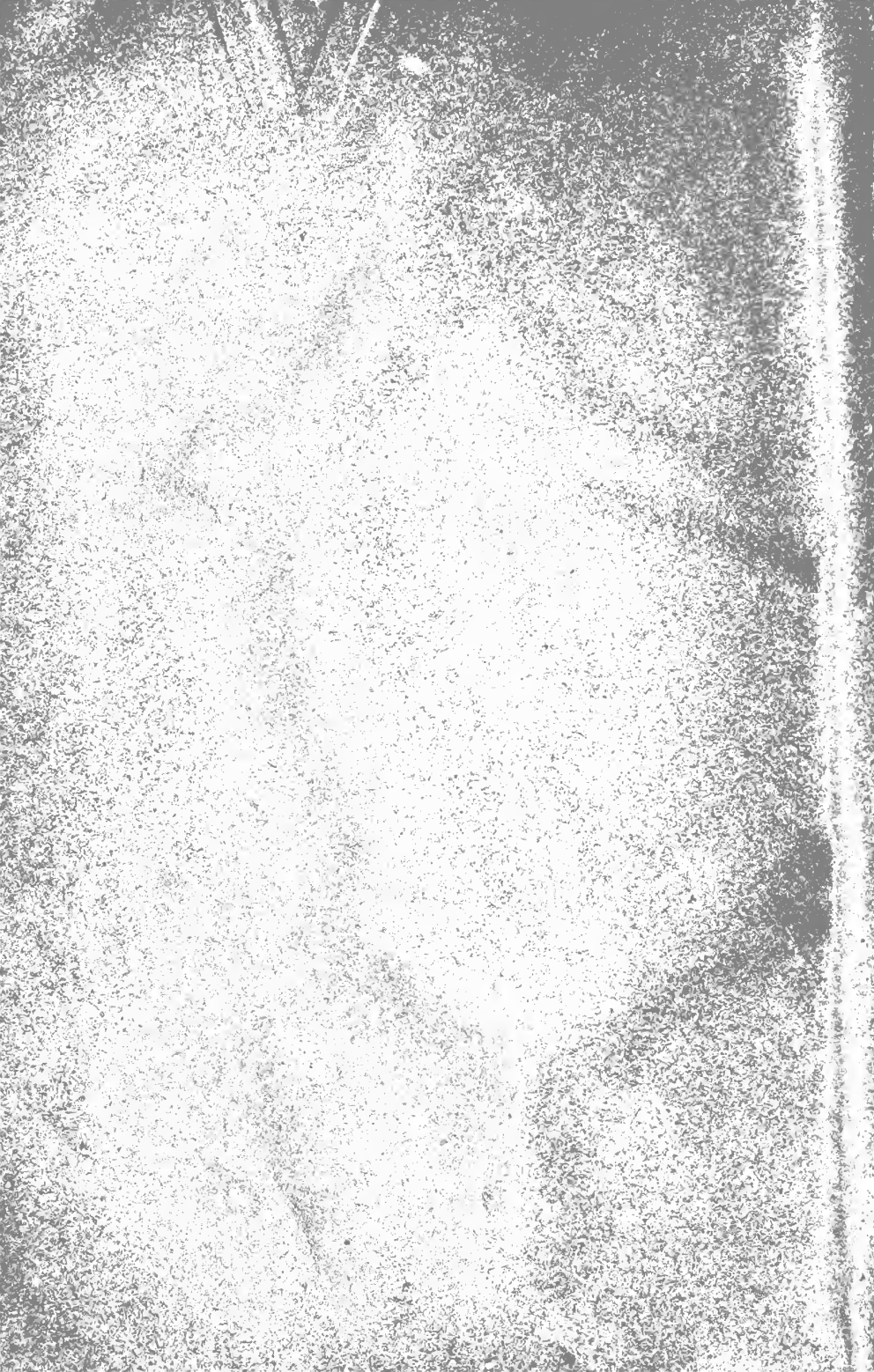


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INCIDENTS OF THE THREATENED OUTBREAK OF HOLE-IN-THE-DAY AND OTHER OJIBWAYS AT TIME OF SIOUX MASSACRE OF 1862.

BY GEORGE W. SWEET.

Considering it the duty of each of the old settlers of the state, and especially members of the Minnesota Historical society, to contribute facts within their personal knowledge relating to the principal events in the early settlement of our state, in order that a record thereof may be preserved, I beg leave to offer the following account of the part taken by the undersigned in the suppression and settlement of the troubles with the Chippewas, in August, 1862, at the outbreak of the Sioux massacre.

On the 20th day of August, 1862, a messenger came to me at Sauk Rapids, requesting me without delay to call upon the commissioner of Indian affairs, Wm. P. Dole, at the Stearns House in St. Cloud. Having just heard of the outbreaks at Acton and Redwood, and the slaughter of Capt. Marsh's company, I lost no time in complying with the request. I found on reaching there, Maj. L. C. Walker, Chippewa agent, who had just arrived from the Chippewa agency, above Crow Wing, bringing startling accounts of the hostile attitude of Hole-in-the-Day and the Indians under him. He was greatly excited, and expressed the opinion that Hole-in-the-Day and Little Crow,* of the Sioux, had been in communication with each other and had agreed to begin a simultaneous attack upon the whites, with the belief that, as most of the able-bodied men of Minnesota had gone South, they would be able to drive all others out of the country and recover their lands. He feared that the prisoners in the hands of the Indians had already been massacred, in retaliation for the unsuccessful attempt made by him to capture Hole-in-the-Day, in

George W. Sweet came to Minnesota in 1849. He was a carpenter, but studied law later. He married a daughter of Charles H. Oakes, the long-time trader among the Ojibways of Lake Superior. Mr. Sweet has been a member of the legislature, and has lived on the frontier, at Sauk Rapids and elsewhere, for forty-five years. M.

*It was every way impossible that there was any concert of action between Little Crow and Hole-in-the-Day. The like causes of unrest existed among the Ojibways as among the Sioux, but not to the same extent. Difficulties in regard to treaties, dissatisfaction with traders and agents, were common to both nations. W. R. M.

which case he thought the massacre would become general and indiscriminate. He urged me to attempt to open communication with the hostiles, who were camped near Gull lake, with a view to their pacification, if possible. After considerable parley, and upon the urgent solicitations of Commissioner Dole, I reluctantly consented to attempt the mission.

Under instructions to report to Commissioner Dole at St. Paul, I started with private team, and on my route met scores of settlers fleeing from their homes, some bound for St. Paul, some for the states below and others for the forts. Their countenances blanched with fear, they imagined that every clump of timber and ravine along the line of their flight had hostile Indians lying in wait to slaughter them.

On reaching Little Falls I made inquiry as to who were then at Long Prairie, and was informed that a Mrs. Weeks was there with her children, without a man in the settlement, her husband being then absent on business in Cincinnati. I sent a team after them, with instructions to lose no time in getting them away from there. Mrs. W. was almost forced into the wagon, as she had heard nothing of any Indian troubles and was daily looking for the return of her husband. Their departure was none too soon, for they were but a short distance from their house, when, looking back, they saw the Sioux in the act of firing the buildings. On meeting Mr. Weeks two days after in St. Paul, and informing him of their safety, his happiness was so great that he threw his arms around me and fairly overwhelmed me with expressions of his thankfulness. Between Fort Ripley and Crow Wing I met Peter Roy, United States interpreter, accompanied by Bad Boy, one of the chiefs, both of whom urged me to turn around and not expose myself to danger by attempting to open negotiations with the hostiles at Gull lake, as they had both done their best to avert a general war and massacre, but had failed, and were now fleeing to save their own lives. At Crow Wing I sought out Clement H. Beaulieu, Sr., who had been formerly the foremost trader among the Chippewas, but who had been refused a renewal of his license to trade in the Indian country on the ground, as stated to me by Clark W. Thompson, superintendent of Indian affairs, that in politics Beaulieu was not in accord with the administration, and whatever good things there were, they proposed to have.

I informed Mr. Beaulieu of the mission I had undertaken, and requested him to accompany me to the hostile camp. He con-

sented, though he expressed his fears that we were too late to save the lives of the prisoners in the hands of the Indians, and suggested that we might possibly share their fate. Taking a team with George Fairbanks as driver, we reached within a half mile of the Indian camp, where we left our team, and proceeded on foot to the creek between Gull and Round lakes, where we were stopped by an armed Indian, a picket guard, but pushing by him, he gave the alarm by a loud cry of "A white man in camp," and instantly, with a terrific war-whoop, the whole force of Indians sprang to arms, and like Roderick Dhu's force, they seemed to come out of the ground, and we were surrounded by more than three hundred warriors armed, some with rifles, some with "Nor'west" guns, others with war clubs, tomahawks, scalping knives, and a few had scythes to which they had fitted handles like corn cutters. Crowding our way through the excited mass towards the headquarters of Hole-in-the-day, which was distinguished from the other wigwams by a flagstaff in front flying a small flag, not the stars and stripes, however, but one of their own make, we here met the renowned chief, whose face looked paler than usual, but in which we could discover no sign of welcome, such as I had been accustomed to receive on meeting him.

At my request, he ordered the warriors to move back and give us room, whereupon they formed themselves into a semicircle of about thirty feet in diameter. In spite of Hole-in-the-day's motions to the contrary, Big Dog, a brave old chief, a personal friend of mine, forced his way up to me, and, grasping my hand, pressed it three times distinctly, which he afterwards explained to me as meaning that he would sacrifice his own life before I should be harmed. Two or three others attempted the hand shaking, but were ordered back.

All being seated on the grass, I informed Hole-in-the-day that I had come to him from the commissioner of Indian affairs, to learn from his own mouth, what his complaints were, and what were his intentions; that is, whether he wanted war or peace with the white people. He replied that he did not want war, but only his rights; that he could not get his rights by peaceable means; that the government agents had been stealing from them; that they had brought new traders into the country with whom the agent was in partnership, and with whom the agent insisted they should do all their trading. That the agent

had put annuity goods into these traders' stores to be sold to the Indians. I replied to him that if his object was to have their wrongs redressed they could never accomplish it by force, but their only way to succeed would be to have a commission appointed to investigate these charges, and that I was authorized by the commissioner to say that he would be glad to listen to their complaints, and if well founded, they should have redress. He then said that was satisfactory, and he would meet the commissioner and settle all difficulties peaceably.

I insisted upon the release of the prisoners in his hands, as a proof of his peaceful intentions, to which he consented, and Mrs. Arthur Garden and her children were brought in and delivered up. As it was then nine at night, and I had no means of transporting the balance of the prisoners, I requested him to release them the next morning, which was done. It was further agreed between us that a truce of four days should be kept, in which the Indians should remain where they were, and not disturb anything at the agency or go near the white settlements; and on the part of the government, I agreed that there should be no further attempts by the soldiers to capture him, and in the meantime I would report to Commissioner Dole at St. Paul and return to the Indians.

Hole-in-the-day sent a guard to accompany us about three miles so as to pass us beyond their picket line. We reached Crow Wing about midnight, where I learned that during my absence at Gull lake the commandant at Fort Ridgely, in order to strengthen the force at the post, which had been reduced to twenty-six effective men, had impressed into the service temporarily all the able-bodied men found at Crow Wing, and among these my driver, who had taken with him my team. After a little delay, I found among the half-breeds a team to carry me to a point opposite the fort. When about a mile from the fort, I heard in the direction of the post a single shot, followed by a volley. It appears that a flatboat or wangan had got loose and floating down the channel, the sentinel hailed and receiving no reply, he fired at it, which brought out the guard, who delivered a volley into it, suspecting it contained a force of Indians intending to make a lodgement upon the bank of the river where there was no stockade.

Crossing the river in a small boat a few minutes after this alarm, I came near being shot by a picket in the darkness, but,

hearing the click of his gun as he cocked it, I got as near to the ground as possible, from which position I hailed the picket, and remained there until he could get the guard out, and satisfy them that I did not intend to storm the fort.

After informing the commanding officer as to the state of affairs, and requesting the military to respect the terms of the truce agreed upon, I was informed that the ladies of the post were at Chaplain Geer's quarters, where they desired my presence. It was now about two a. m., but I found the ladies, with some from Crow Wing, perspiring over a red-hot stove, casting bullets, of which they had already about a half bushel on a table, which they were trimming ready for use.

Assuring the ladies that there were no Indians within fifteen miles of them and no danger of an attack for at least four days, I left at three o'clock and reached Little Falls at sunrise, where I met Capt. Hall on his way to Fort Ripley to assume command, accompanied by Capt. Chas. H. Beaulieu. Capt. Hall assured me that the terms of the truce made with the Indians should be scrupulously kept by him.

On reaching Sauk Rapids I found the people who had not already left were on the point of abandoning their homes, to seek protection within some fortified place. I here brought into play my authority in the state militia, by ordering Capt. E. O. Hamlin to put the alarmed men at work throwing up rifle-pits around the town, and especially near the Hyperborean hotel, with directions to cease work as soon as he deemed it advisable. Two or three hours' work in the hot sun convinced them that there was no danger, and consequently no need of rifle-pits.

Reaching St. Paul, I reported to the commissioner, informing him of the release of the prisoners, of the truce and the anxiety of the Indians to meet him and settle all the troubles, requesting him to accompany me on my return to the Indians and make a settlement with them before any new complications should arise; but he stated that he would only go there with sufficient troops as an escort to be able to protect him from them, and for this purpose he must have at least two full companies. His request for the troops was taken by me to Gov. Ramsey at his house, who informed me that Fort Snelling had scarcely enough men for guard mount, as he had ordered every available man to join Gen. Sibley's expedition against the Sioux.

I informed the Governor that I had passed Capt. Libby's and another company on their way to Fort Snelling to be mustered in, and requested him to issue the order to Col. Smith, then in command at Fort Snelling, for two companies, so that I could return to the Indians and assure them that the commissioner would meet them in council. The Governor seemed to think there was no real necessity for the troops, and even if there was, it was improper to issue the order before they had the men. I found the commander-in-chief firm in his refusal, until I was warmly seconded by Mrs. Ramsey, who had been a silent listener to our discussion.

About 1 a. m. I was able to exhibit to the commissioner the order for the troops, and early the next morning I delivered it in person to Col. Smith at Fort Snelling, who informed me that he had no transportation for the troops. To make sure of transportation I went on and met Capt. Libby near Minneapolis, and, calling him aside, requested him to detain all of the teams on reaching the fort, as he would have need of them to move his men as soon as they were mustered in, clothed and equipped.

I reached the Indian camp again before the expiration of the four days, and found them all ready for a council, having in the meanwhile erected a large council wigwam with a capacity for a hundred men or more. A quarter of an hour after my arrival the chiefs and head men were all here assembled, and, after the ordinary preliminaries, and a smoke of the pipe of peace, Hole-in-the-day came forward and, shaking hands with me, said, "We have faithfully kept our agreement made with you and are glad you have kept your promise and come back to us. Now what message and reply do you bring to us from our father in Washington?" (Commissioner.) I arose and replied that their father in Washington was pleased to hear that they had released the prisoners, and that they wanted peace rather than war, and that he would come to them and listen to their complaints, and if he found they had been wronged, they should have all their wrongs righted. The question then put to me was, "How soon will he be here?" I could not reply, "as soon as he gets sufficient troops to guard him," but gave an answer that from the "how, hows" seemed to satisfy them in these words: "I have been to St. Paul and back almost as quick as a bird would fly, as I am not a big chief but a small

man; you know you can throw a small stone more swiftly than a big one."

The council ended, many of the Indians gathered around me and warmly shook my hand, stating they were glad the troubles were about to be all settled. I desire here to say that in all these negotiations at Gull lake I had Clement H. Beaulieu, Sr., with me, and it was largely owing to his tact and intimate knowledge of the Indians that I was enabled to succeed in this difficult and dangerous undertaking. I feel that he has never had justice done him for the magnanimous part he took during those few momentous days. He had been debarred from collecting the just demands against the Indians for goods sold to individuals on credit while he was a licensed trader, refused a renewal of his license, thus reducing him from affluence to comparative penury, and still, smarting under all these wrongs, he was ready and willing to risk his life to save the lives and property of those who were trying to ruin him.

Having reported again to Commissioner Dole as to the result of my second visit to Hole-in-the-day's camp, and not agreeing with him as to the propriety of making a show of military force at the council to be held with the Indians, I left him at Fort Ripley, desiring a little rest, not having slept an average of two hours in the twenty-four for a week or more. In his attempt to get the Indians under Hole-in-the-day into a cul de sac, at Crow Wing on the 10th of September, Gen. Dole found himself outgeneraled by the wily Indian, and was completely surrounded and at the mercy of the Indians.

Realizing his perilous situation after an ineffectual attempt to send to Fort Ripley for reinforcements, he essayed conciliation in a harangue contrasting strongly with the terrible threats made a few hours before at Fort Ripley. In trembling accents he commenced, "My dear red brethren," and by these means a conflict was avoided. Had a single shot been fired by some hot headed, reckless scamp, nothing could have saved a slaughter of these raw troops together with the commissioner and attendants. Among these was A. S. H. White, chief clerk of the interior department, and a number of other civilians.

Hole-in-the-day afterwards stated to me that he only wanted to show Gen. Dole that he was not so easily to be outgeneraled.

In his annual report for 1862, p. 17, Commissioner Dole says that "the prisoners after being taken to the camp at Gull lake

had been liberated through the influence of the chiefs of the Pillagers." He knew that they were liberated upon my request. James Whitehead, afterwards agent for these same Indians, can state how he came to be released. Only for some emphatic expressions of mine in relation to a want of courage on the part of the commissioner, a very different account of the part taken by me would have been given, and I should have received pay for my services. As it was I received nothing, either in per diem or credit for time and risk of life.

Apologizing to the society for the length of this communication, and especially for what may appear egotistical in relating so much of my own doings, I can only say that it has seemed to me the better way for each one to record the part taken by him personally, and then it can be sifted by the compiler of future histories.

Sauk Rapids, Minn., March 1, 1887.



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